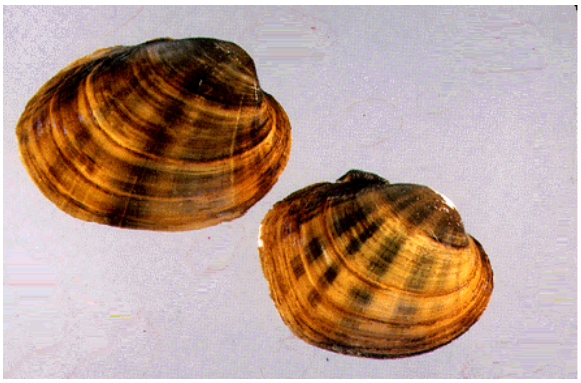
La Crosse FRO Accomplishment Highlights Report

Federal and State Lands Assistance (Endangered Species):

Endangered Higgins-Eye Mussel Project Expanded
05/20/2003



This project is part of a multiple year effort by federal and state natural resource agencies to increase declining populations of the federally endangered mussel Lampsilis higginsi. These efforts include multiple strategies for both intensive and extensive culture of this unionid. Funding for these efforts are provided by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ecological Services division. To date over a 1.5 million juvenile Lampsilis higginsi juveniles have been released in the upper Mississippi River watershed.

Genoa National Fish Hatchery, in cooperation with Ecological Services Twin Cities Field Office, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, and four upper Midwest states, has completed a major portion of its 2003 efforts for the ongoing recovery of the endangered Higgins-Eye Pearlymussel. This recovery project, which began in 2000, is part of a multi-agency effort to bolster the drastic decline in population and range that this species has experience in the last half of the 20th century. Accomplishments during 2003 include the production, infestation and distribution of more than 7,200 mussel-bearing host fish to selected sites within the Upper Mississippi River watershed, the expansion of cage culture activities, and renewed captive culture techniques to be carried out on the Genoa National Fish Hatchery. As part of their life cycle, most freshwater mussels must parasitize a vertebrate 'host' as a step in their larval development. It is at this juncture in the life cycle that Genoa NFH and its cooperators begin efforts to reproduce mussels for recovery efforts in the Mississippi River. Hatchery staff and dozens of volunteers from other U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, State DNRs and members of the hatcheries' friends group began the week long artificial inoculation process in late April when hundreds of larval mussels are placed on the gills of host fish. After the fish are parasitized they are held on the hatchery for 30 days for evaluation and incubation. The next step in the process is the distribution of the infested fish to selected sites in the Upper Mississippi River. At these pre-selected sites the fish are either released free into the environment to spread their attached mussels throughout the local area or placed in 'cages' that were previously constructed at the hatchery. Once metamorphosis of the larval mussels is complete and the juveniles have fallen off the host fish, project biologist release the fish into the local environment. These 'caged' fish offer the possibility for project personnel to gather released juvenile mussels later in the summer for relocation to other sites in the river. This year's cage effort included over 85 cages placed in four states in the upper Mississippi and Wisconsin rivers. This extensive effort, plus the free release of thousands of inoculated fish in Wisconsin and Iowa represents a 27 percent increase over 2002 efforts and is projected to produce over 1 million juvenile Higgins-eye mussels into the watershed.

Roger Gordon

Tribal Assistance:

Teamwork is Key for Lake Sturgeon Recovery Effort
05/23/2003

The goal of this project is to restore lake sturgeon back onto the White Earth Reservation, which will help re-establish a population in the Red River of the North. This portion of the project is vital to building a population base.


A young sturgeon. ©1985 Wiconsin Sea Grant

Lake Sturgeon once inhabited the Red River of the North and its tributaries. In 1926 a lake sturgeon weighing 176 pounds was caught in White Earth Lake. However, since the turn of the century, lake sturgeon populations have declined due to over harvest, pollution and water development projects. The last record of a lake sturgeon in this area came from Lake Lida in 1957. In 1997 the White Earth Natural Resources Department, assisted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Rainy River First Nations, entered into an agreement to restore Lake Sturgeon in White Earth Lake and Round Lake on the White Earth Reservation. Lake sturgeon are primitive fish that historically inhabited many of Minnesota's large rivers and the lakes associated with those rivers. Native American cultures were partially dependent on the availability of lake sturgeon. Indian villages were often located near waters where sturgeon spawned. Early European settlement on Lake of the Woods was due to commercial fishing for lake sturgeon when their caviar and fine flesh were known worldwide. It is a goal of the resource agencies to restore lake sturgeon to this part of its original range. The management plan calls for 8,000 fingerlings to be stocked in White Earth Lake and another 5,000 fingerlings to be stocked in Round Lake. Prior to stocking fingerlings a significant team effort takes place. One huge hurdle is to test the sturgeon for viral infections prior to shipping the eggs. In a normal year this is completed in advance to the egg shipment, however, in 2003 this was not possible. It took a true team effort to accomplish this goal. First, Rick Nelson (La Crosse Fish Health Center) negotiated an agreement with the Wisconsin Health Lab to allow the Service to ship the eggs prior to completion of the viral tests. This could only occur if Doug Aloisi (Genoa National Fish Hatchery) agreed to isolate the eggs until the viral clearance was given. This meant extra work for both offices but it was accomplished without hesitation. On May 18, Randy Zortman and Tom McCully (White Earth Natural Resources Dept.) along with Scott Yess (La Crosse FRO), assisted Joe Hunter and his staff (Rainy River First Nations) with spawning more than 30 adult lake sturgeon. At the same time, fin clips were being screened for virus infection by Terry Ott (La Crosse Fish Health Center). On May 21, the eggs were delivered to Doug Aloisi and Jeff Lockington (Genoa National Fish Hatchery). The staff at Genoa did a fantastic job to prepare an isolation facility to receive the eggs. Results of the viral tests proved negative and were completed on May22. This will allow the staff at Genoa NFH to raise the sturgeon outside the isolation facility. In late summer the sturgeon will be tagged and then transported to the White Earth Reservation. This was an incredible team effort and thanks to all who participated.

Scott Yess

Outreach:

La Crosse FRO Assists Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge with Fishing Day 06/07/2003

Inner-city youth learned valuable lessons in the biological, cultural and sport aspects of angling. Children learned fish handling, identification, filleting and collecting techniques. Many children caught and handled fish for their first time.

As a massive carp was lifted out of the fish tank on the Kann electrofishing boat, there was nothing but sounds of oo's and ah's from children standing on the banks of one of the bass ponds at Minnesota Valley NWR during the 2003 Annual Fishing Day on June 7. Inner-city youth were bussed out to the refuge to learn about angling, how to handle fish, fish identification, filleting fish, and how fishery biologists collect fish by electrofishing. An employee of the La Crosse FRO and a volunteer gave an electrofishing demonstration to over 120 youth and their chaperones. People were amazed how fast fish could be collected by "shocking." Children were tested on their fish identification skills they learned in a prior station by viewing the fish after they had been shocked in the pond. Gizzard shad, common carp, bluegill, green sunfish, orange spotted sunfish, largemouth bass, bowfin, and yellow perch were some of the species netted in the pond. After a lunch of hotdogs and walleye fillets, children tested their skills by angling in the bass ponds. Although the children wanted to use the shocker, they were quite successful with just their rods and reels!

Heidi Keuler

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

FRO's Experiment With Mid-water Trawl to Corral Asian Carp 06/13/2003

A USFWS trawl crew *conducted 4.5 hours of testing experimental mid-water trawl to capture nuisance Asian carp, and surveyed for nuisance round goby in advance of the known goby range in the Illinois River, IL. The trawl crew assessed the effectiveness of experimental mid-water trawl in capturing nuisance Asian carp, and assisted in determining the leading edge of the round goby range and their relative abundance in the Illinois River, IL. These surveys are used to determine the progress of nuisance round goby/Asian carp expansion, and the effectiveness of the Chicago Ship & Sanitary Canal Electrical Demonstration Barrier in preventing further range expansion of nuisance fish.*

The Ashland and La Crosse Fishery Resource Offices experimented with a mid-water trawl to capture Asian carp in the Illinois River. The mid-water trawl was one of several gear types used in the eighth annual Goby Round-up/Carp Corral led by La Crosse FRO. This annual survey tracks the range and monitors relative abundance of the nuisance species, the round goby, expanding toward the Mississippi River, and several species of Asian carp expanding toward Lake Michigan. An n Ashland FRO trawler, crewed by Burr Fisher-East Lansing Ecological Services and Gary Czypinski-Ashland FRO, towed the custom-designed mid-water trawl for approximately 4.5 hours where Asian carp were known to be present, near the confluence of the Illinois and Vermillion Rivers. The mid-water trawl collected one goldeneye and one freshwater drum, but no Asian carp were captured. Having determined that the mid-water trawl had been given a sufficient test, the Ashland trawler moved up the Illinois River to the Dresden Dam and Locks near Morris to bottom trawl for the round goby. Freshwater drum, goldeneye, catfish, smelt, spottail shiner, and juvenile walleye were collected, but no round

goby were captured in bottom trawls near Morris, approximately 55 miles west of Lake Michigan. Fisher and Czypinski were also interviewed by reporter Jo Ann Hustis of the Morris Daily Herald.

Gary Czypinski

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

Alpena FRO Assists With Annual ANS Surveillance in the Illinois Waterway
06/13/2003

The Service works to monitor and combat the spread of aquatic nuisance species through inter and intra-agency coordination.

On June 9-13, Anjanette Bowen of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Fishery Resources Office in Alpena, Mich., assisted the La Crosse FRO with efforts to determine the extent of the range of the round goby and Asian carp in the Illinois waterway. Both the round goby and Asian carp are aquatic nuisance fish species and are thought to compete with native fish for food and habitat. Round goby have entered the Illinois Waterway from Lake Michigan and are feared to be spreading into the Mississippi River. Asian carp escaped from fish farms in the southern drainage of the Mississippi River and are feared to be about to enter the Great Lakes. Both species are expected to cause considerable damage to native fish communities. The La Crosse FRO has initiated and coordinated the annual survey since 1995. Many state, federal and community agencies cooperate on this project which involves angling, trapping, gillnetting and trawling for round goby and Asian carp along 100 miles of the Illinois waterway. Alpena FRO has assisted with the annual survey since 1997.

Anjanette Bowen

Outreach:

Ready, Set, Fish! Genoa Hosts First Annual Fishing Clinic
06/21/2003

This annual activity will help create community support, and pass on tradition of responsible recreational fishing.

Over 120 people attended the first annual Genoa National Fish Hatchery Fishing Clinic/Derby this June, hosted by the Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Fishery Stations. 65 children from local school, and civic organizations attended to learn more about fishing gear, boating and water safety, and cleaning and care of their catch. The children also were given an opportunity to participate in a casting contest. After an hour and a half of moving through 4 different learning stations, the kids were turned loose to try their hand at catching rainbow trout, yellow perch, and bluegills in one of the hatchery ponds. Excess rainbow trout broodfish weighing over 2 pounds apiece were also stocked to add a little excitement

to the day. After 2 hours of fishing and over 50 fish being caught, the Friends group hosted a lunch, and prizes donated by local businesses were distributed. Each child received a grab bag full of information on fishing, and aquatic nuisance species prevention.

The Friends of the Upper Mississippi River Fisheries Stations is a support group for the La Crosse Fisheries Resource Office, the La Crosse Fish Health Center, and the Genoa National Fish Hatchery. This first derby was a cooperative effort between the 3 fisheries stations and the Friends Group, with staff from all 3 stations participating in the event. It was also the first project completed with our newly organized Friends Group. Several interested parents attending the event expressed interest in joining the Friends, and were steered to Friends group members for information on the club, and how to become involved. The success of the event was measured by the smiles on the children's faces. A very enjoyable summer morning was had by all!

Doug Aloisi

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

National Invasive Species Advisory Committee Goes Fishing
06/26/2003

Through this fun and informative outreach activity, the National Invasive Species Advisory Committee gained a better appreciation and understanding of the invasive species issues facing the Great Lakes/Big Rivers Region.

Members of the National Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) went angling for round gobies in

Calumet Harbor of Lake Michigan in Chicago as part of their post-meeting field trip. Pam Thiel, project leader at the La Crosse Fishery Resource Office, discussed the impact invasive species on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River ecosystems, and then demonstrated goby angling techniques. The 25 participants varied from expert anglers to first-time fishermen. Everyone had an opportunity to catch gobies and then "pickle" their trophies as a remembrance of the event.

ISAC was established by Executive Order 13112 in 1999 to advise the National Invasive Species Council on invasive species issues and act as representatives of the many stakeholders. The Council is an inter-Departmental group that helps to coordinate and ensure complimentary, cost-efficient, and effective Federal activities regarding invasive species. The Council co-chairs are the Secretaries of Interior, Agriculture, and Commerce.

In addition to angling, their field trip also included a stop at the electrical invasive species barrier site on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, and visits to areas where control and research are being conducted on Asian longhorn beetle, buckthorn, and purple loosestrife. However, Dr. Chris Dionigi, Assistant Director of the Council and organizer of the field trip, said, "Angling for gobies was by far the most fun and memorable activity." ISAC members were amazed at the high density of gobies and their aggressiveness. This angling activity and their take-home piscine memento will help them remember the impact of invasive species on our Region as they provide national policy guidance to the Council.

Pam Thiel